1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

CHAPTER VIII

DEATH

Death Rites—Memorial Rites—Fate of the Dead

Death Rites

DEATH is marked by even more complicated and prolonged rites than marriage. Like so many primitive peoples, the Bella Coola not only carry out elaborate rituals soon after the actual decease, but hold lengthy commemorative and mourning ceremonials in later years. As these require the co-operation of a large number of people, the death of an individual affects a wider circle than his own relatives, and the celebrations have, therefore, an important social as well as religious significance.

Omens of Death

It is not surprising that the Bella Coola, believing in the omnipresence of the supernatural, should consider various peculiar occurrences to be omens of death. One of the simplest of these is to hear the falling of a tree when there is neither wind nor other reason to account for it. Such a fall is audible only to the person whom it warns of approaching death, either to himself or to one of his relatives. A number of men may be in the forest together, when one of them hears the crash of a tree and notices that his companions are unaware of it; he realizes that this is an omen and protects himself by calling out:

"Let this evil react against whoever has been plotting evil against me."

The basis of this custom is the belief that someone has been practising black magic against the hearer, who, by this answer, is able to cause the sorcery to recoil upon the malefactor. Even more dangerous than to hear a falling tree, is to have one crash